

A public consultation on the approval of level 3 technical qualifications

A framework of technical qualification categories for IfATE approval, and our proposed approach to approving level 3 technical qualifications

Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE)

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Foreword

Technical education is undergoing an ambitious period of reform and the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) has a key role to play in bringing employer voices to the fore. This will ensure that technical education is designed to meet the needs of employers and support the economy now and in the future.

IfATE is a leading partner in the improvement of post-16 technical education, including driving up the quality of apprenticeships, rolling out new T Levels and approving Higher Technical Qualifications. Our focus is now turning to qualifications at level 3 and below for students in England who are 16 and over. The Department for Education (DfE) has set a clear direction for streamlining and raising the quality of technical qualifications. We will take responsibility for approving technical qualifications that present opportunities for people to enter skilled employment or further their careers. DfE will only determine which technical qualifications at level 3 should be approved for funding once we have given the qualifications our approval.

It is vital that employers can influence the design of technical qualifications and apprenticeships to ensure these products equip people for the skilled jobs employers offer. Our cornerstone tool to ensure our products meet employers' needs are 'occupational standards', which are designed by employers to set out the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed in an occupation. It is government's ambition that post-16 technical education and training will be aligned to employer-led occupational standards by 2030 and we are committed to achieving this.

This consultation seeks views on our approach to approval of technical qualifications using the new powers we have been granted through the [Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022](#). We have worked closely with DfE and Ofqual, the qualifications regulator in England, to develop this approach and will continue to work with them as we implement our approval process. We are keen that we establish an approval process that between us is as streamlined and coherent as possible.

To strengthen the role of employers in informing which qualifications we should approve on their behalf, our consultation sets out plans to introduce an 'employer strategic steer'. This will be an ambitious new product taking a view across different occupations within and between routes. It will describe the views of our route panel members (who are experts in their industries) of the current qualification offer and future industry needs. We intend that this should be used as a guide by those who design qualifications, referred to in this consultation as awarding bodies, to support them as they develop their technical qualifications.

This consultation will be of particular importance to awarding bodies who develop technical qualifications, but we are keen to also engage with the wide range of people who use technical qualifications and look forward to hearing your views.

1. Who is this consultation for?

This consultation is on our proposed approach to using the new statutory powers for approving technical qualifications granted to us through the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022.

The consultation sets out our proposed approach to approving technical qualifications at level 3, as set out in DfE's [review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 in England](#). This includes the categories they will be approved against. The approach proposed in this consultation may also apply to technical qualifications at level 2 and below. This is subject to the outcome of DfE's [consultation on post-16 qualifications at level 2 and below](#), which is expected later this year.

Much of the content in this consultation is technical detail aimed at awarding bodies. We also want to seek the views of others who work in or have an interest in post-16 education to ensure that our decisions are as fully informed as possible. The consultation may be of particular interest to:

- a. employers
- b. awarding bodies, or their representatives, especially those that offer (or intend to offer) technical qualifications that would need to be approved by IfATE in order to be eligible for public funding in the future
- c. schools, colleges, and training providers, especially those that deliver (or intend to deliver) technical qualifications that are or will be approved by IfATE
- d. students
- e. professional, statutory and regulatory bodies

Issue date:

30 June 2022

End date:

10 August 2022

Enquiries:

Please email any questions about this consultation to IFATE.post16@education.gov.uk

Response:

IfATE will analyse all the responses to this consultation with the aim to publish the findings on the IfATE website later in 2022. Further details on IfATE's proposed timeline for the consultation, finalised policy publication, and implementation can be

found later in this document. [Responses can be provided by 23:59 on 10th August 2022 via an online form.](#)

If for exceptional reasons, you are unable to use the online system, for example because you use specialist accessibility software that is not compatible with the system, you may download a word document version of the form and email or post it to us:

IFATE.post16@education.gov.uk

or

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Post-16 Qualifications Team

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2. Executive Summary

In 2019, DfE launched a review of all post-16 qualifications at level 3 and below, including technical qualifications, and set out a [‘case for change’](#) to achieve a vision for a simplified and streamlined landscape for the qualifications it funds.

DfE pointed to the current complexity of the qualifications landscape at level 3 and below – partly due to the vast number of qualifications available at this level. Providers, such as schools and further education colleges, need a clear and simple set of options to support students to choose the right qualifications for their future careers. This is an issue for employers as well as providers and students. Research published in 2021 by the qualifications regulator for England, Ofqual, about the [perceptions of vocational and technical qualifications in England \(wave 4\)](#) noted that two in ten employers said that it is not clear which qualifications were relevant to their organisation.

DfE also [consulted on the level 3 qualifications that they should fund in the future](#). The types of qualifications which will be funded will have a clear purpose to either enable progression to further study (‘academic qualifications’) or to enable progression into employment (‘technical qualifications’). DfE have recently consulted on the future for qualifications at level 2 and below and will respond to this later this year.

As part of the DfE’s review of level 3 post 16 qualifications consultation outcomes, IfATE was asked to lead the future approval of technical qualifications. We will not be involved in funding decisions. DfE will make these independently from, and after, our approval processes. The first IfATE-approved technical qualifications will be available for first-teach from September 2025.

This consultation sets out our proposals for approving technical qualifications using the approval powers granted by the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022.

This consultation is split into two parts.

In Part 1 (section 4) we explain the framework for categorising technical qualifications in order to understand funding arrangements, the relationship to other products and the tests that need to be met for approval. The framework includes technical qualifications we already approve: [Higher Technical Qualifications](#) (levels 4 and 5) and [technical qualifications in T Levels](#) (level 3). In future, our framework will incorporate other technical qualifications at level 3 and (subject to the outcome of the recent DfE consultation) level 2.

This consultation provides advance sight of category requirements to allow awarding bodies to begin assessing where their current qualifications sit within the new landscape. Each qualification proposed will need a stated ‘core aim’ and an underpinning set of purposes statements to specify the expertise and competence acquired through the qualification.

Part 2 (sections 6 to 12) sets out our proposed approach to approving technical qualifications focusing on level 3. The new powers establish 'statutory tests' that we should apply during our approval process. These tests require qualifications to have a relationship to our published employer-led occupational standards. Through the consultation we will provide details of the criteria we intend to apply when assessing whether a technical qualification is suitable to be granted IfATE approval. For level 3 and below approvals, Ofqual will provide feedback into our reviews of these technical qualifications.

The consultation details how the 'employer demand' test will be applied, how occupational relevance will be assessed and how qualifications will be titled to align with occupational standards and signal employer-endorsed quality.

Technical qualifications in T Levels will continue to be approved under existing legal powers. Higher Technical Qualifications will transition to new powers of approval. This will not impact on the established criteria for approving Higher Technical Qualifications as published on our website.

DfE have published [additional guidance on the level 3 reforms](#) for awarding organisations and this guidance is updated regularly with any relevant policy developments from government.

3. Developing an integrated skills system

3.1 OUR AMBITION FOR THE TECHNICAL EDUCATION LANDSCAPE

A truly integrated system brings employers into the heart of product design. This ensures that employers' skill needs, across occupations, can be fully understood and met. We share DfE's ambition that, in future, the qualifications landscape should be streamlined, offering career progression opportunities and giving confidence that qualifications are high-quality. A fundamental part of this will be our employer-led occupational standards, which explain the knowledge, skills and behaviours (KSBs) employers tell us are needed for someone to be competent in an occupation. The occupational standards are presented in our [occupational maps](#), which are a tool available to employers, students and education providers to plan routes from technical education into occupations and career development.

Occupational standards already inform the content of apprenticeships, technical qualifications in T Levels and Higher Technical Qualifications, and will play a similarly important role for technical qualifications at levels 2 and 3. Government committed, in its 2021 policy paper '[Skills for jobs: lifelong learning for opportunity and growth](#)', to ensuring that the vast majority of post-16 technical education and training will be aligned to employer-led occupational standards by 2030. This will help ensure the system for technical education is delivering, across the range of technical education products, what employers have told us they want and view as necessary for their occupations. It will also bring consistency between products, as the basis for the content of both technical qualifications and apprenticeships will be the same occupational standard.

3.2 BRINGING CLARITY TO THE QUALIFICATIONS LANDSCAPE

Employers tell us that they want high-quality technical qualifications that they trust to signal the competence of people applying for jobs or working in their sectors. The criteria set out in this document are intended to ensure that all IfATE-approved technical qualifications are of high-quality and in demand from employers; with IfATE approval becoming a recognised symbol of quality within the technical education system.

Ensuring the right choice of high-quality technical qualifications to upskill current and future employees is an essential factor in boosting the productivity of the UK workforce.

We know that qualification choice is valued in the system. This is reflected in the different categories set out in this consultation, recognising that technical qualifications can serve numerous purposes, both for those taking them and those relying on them as a signal of competence. However, employers also tell us that the current volume of qualifications – with many available for the same occupation – has created a confusing system that is hard for them to navigate and use. Evidence from job vacancy

advertisements show that many employers bypass the technical qualification system altogether when seeking to recruit.

We believe that a clear high-quality landscape should place technical education products at the centre of employers' recruitment decisions, acting as a reliable marker of the skills an individual can offer them. A real test of the success of these reforms will be if we see more employers trusting technical qualifications as a signal of competence, with more technical qualifications forming an integral part of recruitment processes.

This employer recognition in turn ensures that students can confidently select technical education products they know to be valued by industry. This safeguards that students are developing the knowledge, skills and behaviours which will suitably equip them to enter or progress within their chosen occupation.

3.3 PROVIDING EMPLOYER-LED STRATEGIC GUIDANCE TO AWARDING BODIES

IfATE has fifteen route panels made up of experts in their industries. The route panels maintain a strategic overview of their occupational route and are responsible for helping us ensure the quality and currency of occupational standards, apprenticeships and technical qualifications.

To augment the insight contained within the occupational standards, IfATE will share employer insights on skills needs across and between routes with awarding bodies.

We plan to ask our route panels for their views of the technical qualifications available in their route. Panels will then advise us on how well the current offer meets employer needs, as well as taking a forward look to any emerging issues or opportunities within the route area. We will ask our route panels to consider a variety of areas relating to scope and currency of technical qualifications relevant to their route. They may share views on: the need for new technical qualifications (for example, to satisfy demand for emerging skills); the current volume of technical qualifications on offer; and on their confidence in technical qualifications to give students with suitable competence.

In the past year we have published frameworks to support our route panels' and other employers' understanding and thinking around [sustainability](#) and [digital skills](#). We plan to publish a further framework relating to equity, diversity and inclusion later this year (see section 11 for more details on the frameworks). Route panels will also reflect on these frameworks as they share their views.

We will also provide a range of data on technical qualifications in each route, to help inform our route panels' thinking. Data will include that being produced by the recently launched [Unit for Future Skills](#) as well as broader route-level technical education data produced by IfATE and DfE.

This data and the views from our route panels will be brought together to form

employer-led strategic guidance in each route for awarding bodies. Awarding bodies should use this guidance as they plan and develop their technical education offer in each route area.

3.4 IFATE APPROVAL OF TECHNICAL QUALIFICATIONS

We already approve Higher Technical Qualifications and technical qualifications within T Levels.

For other level 3 technical qualifications, and subsequently technical qualifications at level 2 (subject to the outcomes of DfE's consultation and this consultation), we will implement a new approval process. We want this to be an efficient and effective process with which awarding bodies can readily engage.

Our approval process is designed to assure that employer needs are being met through technical qualifications. As well as the link to our employer-designed occupational standards, our route panels will be involved in the reviews of technical qualifications submitted to us. This ensures that employer opinion is central to the approval decisions we make.

We will also consider feedback from the qualifications' regulator, Ofqual. Working with Ofqual we are both able to draw on our unique expertise and powers to ensure the quality of technical qualifications. All qualifications submitted to IfATE for approval will need to be on [Ofqual's Register of Regulated Qualifications](#). This is to ensure that only regulated entities are submitting qualifications for approval. Regulation by Ofqual is designed to ensure that qualifications reliably and validly indicate what a student knows and can do.

[Ofqual is also consulting on changes to its regulatory framework in relation to level 3 qualifications](#) (both academic and technical). Technical qualifications will need to comply with the regulations set by Ofqual.

We intend to publish our criteria for approval of level 3 technical qualifications (excluding technical qualifications in T Levels for which the approval process will not change) in autumn 2022. This is also when Ofqual will publish any regulations specific to level 3 and DfE will publish its qualification funding approval criteria.

We are working closely with Ofqual and DfE to ensure a coherent approach is in place. With any changes to systems and processes, we recognise there is a need to ensure clarity around roles and responsibilities. The diagram below sets out an overview of the processes for the approval of both technical and academic qualifications. For awarding bodies, we have also set out the process for submitting technical qualifications for approval in a separate [awarding body technical guide](#).

Questions we would like respondents to consider:

Questions 1 – 3

Introductory questions about you (See Annex D)

Question 4

What current barriers do employers face when looking to utilise technical qualifications for workforce development and/or recruitment?

Open response

Question 5

We plan to provide guidance to awarding bodies to help them with the shaping of their development priorities/approaches. This guidance would be developed by employers. Do you agree that this would be helpful?

(drop down list/tick box) Yes, No, N /A. Please provide an explanation for your response.

Question 6

What information would it be most useful to include within our strategic guidance to inform the development priorities/approaches of awarding bodies?

Open response

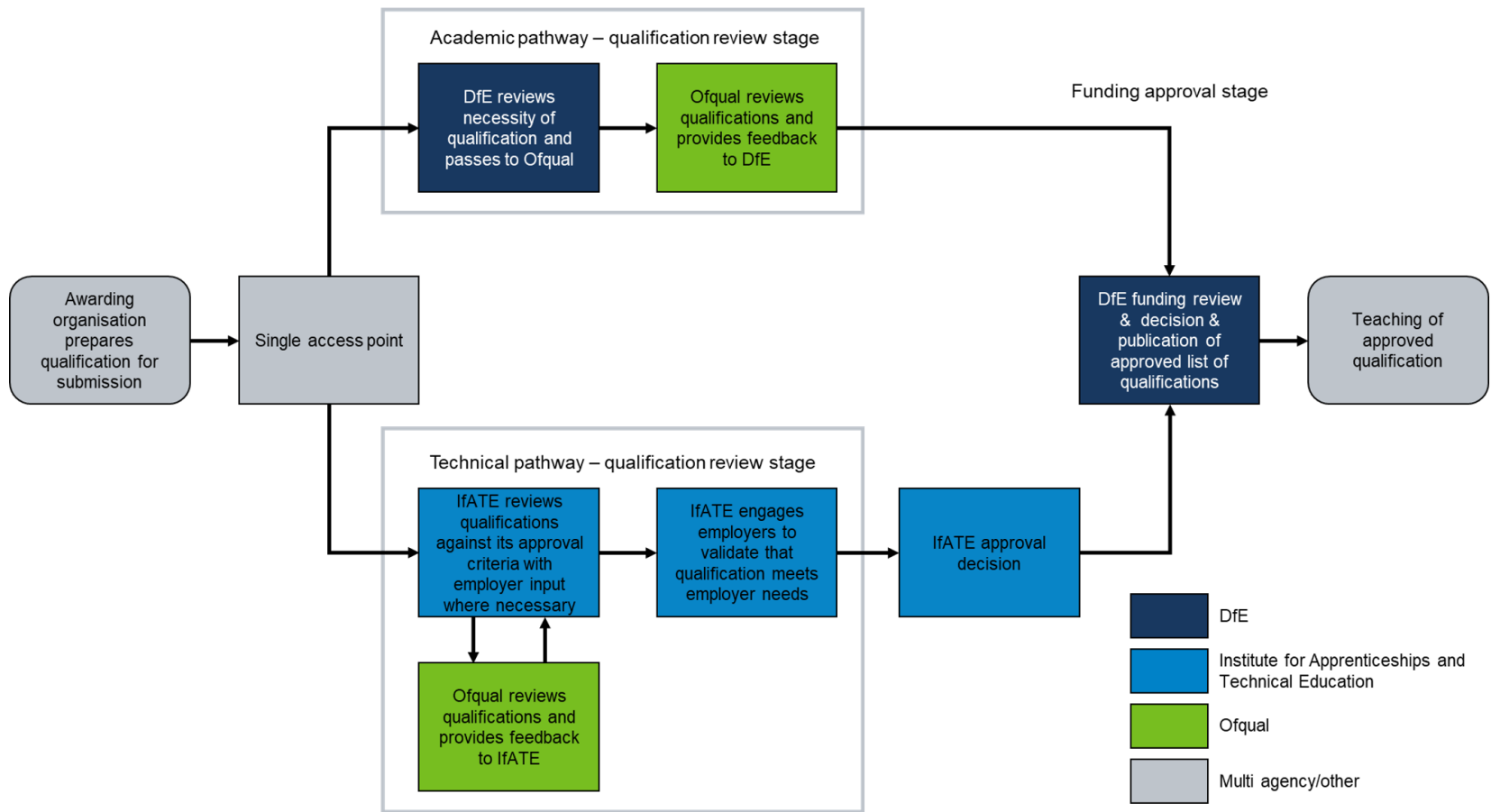


Figure 1: Diagram showing high-level outline of the approval process for academic and technical qualifications at level 3

PART 1 - IfATE's framework for approval of technical qualifications

4. Establishing the framework of categories

4.1 INTRODUCTION

We intend to establish a framework which sets out the range of technical qualifications we are, or will be, responsible for approving. The framework will also detail broadly how we undertake approvals.

The Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022 amends the [Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009](#), enabling us to approve a broader range of technical qualifications.

The Act sets out tests that we must apply in carrying out our approvals process (these are known as statutory tests) and enables us to specify the categories of technical qualification we will approve. We explain the intended technical qualification categories and relevant statutory tests in this consultation. Figure 2 (below) sets out all the technical qualification categories we intend to specify for levels 3,4 and 5.

4.2 APPROVING TECHNICAL QUALIFICATIONS IN THE NEW FRAMEWORK

To ensure qualifications are developed with clear aims and suitable alignment to employer led occupational standards, IfATE will specify categories of technical education qualifications. These categories ensure that awarding bodies are creating focused qualification offers, designed around clear purposes and criteria. For each category IfATE also applies specific tests, appropriate to the category, to ensure the content and assessment is in keeping with employer needs.

Categories also have a clear relationship with DfE publicly funded offer, ensuring awarding bodies are clear as to the public funding which any approved qualification may be considered for.

4.3 CATEGORIES OF TECHNICAL QUALIFICATIONS

4.3.1 Technical qualifications in T Levels

T Levels are becoming an established route at level 3, offering a high-quality technical education option to students alongside apprenticeships and A levels. There has been

substantial engagement by IfATE and DfE about the nature and requirements for these qualifications in recent years. IfATE is therefore not consulting on this category of technical qualification. Technical qualifications in T Levels will be specified as a category in our new framework but will continue to be considered for our approval in the same way as they have been to date.

4.3.2 Higher Technical Qualifications and level 3 and below qualifications

Technical qualifications falling into all other (non-T Level) categories specified by IfATE will in future be approved under new approval powers. The following sections provide detail of all the other categories we will specify at levels 3, 4 and 5, as well as the information we will provide when specifying categories.

4.4 CATEGORY TESTS

For approvals, IfATE will utilise new powers to test the occupational relevance of the content within submitted qualifications.

Broadly speaking, our tests relate to a qualification's relationship to outcomes within our occupational standards. The three tests we utilise for approvals as are follows:

- I. **Occupational outcomes test (Skills Act: 'alternative approval test')**: where a qualification aligns to an occupational standard(s) on the occupational maps and seeks to cover as many KSB outcomes as can be achieved in a course of education
- II. **Specialist outcomes test (Skills Act: 'additional specialist competence test')**: where a qualification builds upon an occupational standard on the occupational maps and offers learning outcomes above and beyond the KSBs in that linked standard
- III. **Significant outcomes test (Skills Act: 'significant outcomes test')**: where a qualification covers a selection of outcomes that may or may not exist within an occupational standard(s)

The **employer demand test** will be applied to all categories detailed below. To meet it, IfATE needs to be satisfied that there is, or is likely to be, demand from employers in the occupations for employees who have obtained the qualification.

4.5 CATEGORIES TO BE SPECIFIED

We will specify categories of technical qualifications for approval. We specify categories to ensure that awarding bodies are clear as to the expectations we have for their submitted qualifications. When specifying a category, we will also specify the relevant test which will be applied for approvals in that category.

The below table presents the categories we intend to specify at level 3, 4 and 5.

IfATE Technical Qualification Categories

Category	Relationship to standard(s)	Core Aim	Category Test	DfE funding offers	Additional category notes	Example qualification
Level 3 occupational entry qualification (does not overlap with a standard covered by T Levels)	Aligns to an occupational standard which is not covered by T Levels	Enables entry to the aligned occupation, although further learning/training in work may be required to reach 'full' occupational competence	Occupational outcomes	16-19 19+	n/a	Level 3 Leisure Management aligned to the Level 3 Leisure Duty Manager standard
Level 3 occupational entry qualification (overlap with a standard covered by T Levels)	Aligns to an occupational standard which is covered by T Levels	Enables entry to the aligned occupation, although further learning/training in work may be required to reach 'full' occupational competence	Occupational outcomes	19+	n/a	Level 3 Business Administration aligned to the Level 3 Business Administrator standard
Level 4 and 5 Higher Technical Qualifications	Aligns to an occupational standard	Allow students to enter their chosen profession or progress onto higher education in a related subject	Occupational outcomes	19+	n/a	Level 4 Cyber Security Technologist aligned to the Level 4 Cyber Security Technologist

						standard
Level 3 additional specialist qualifications	Builds on an occupational standard	Enables an individual to specialise within an occupation having achieved the specialist qualification in addition to their prior achievement of competence in the core occupational outcomes	Specialist outcomes	16-19 19+	Where an awarding body identifies a compelling need, IfATE will consider additional specialist qualifications which align to more than one standard	Level 3 Hybrid/Electric Vehicle Repair and Replacement building on the Level 3 Motor Vehicle Service and Maintenance Technician (Light Vehicle) standard
Level 3 cross-cutting functional competence qualifications	Selectively covers related outcomes from a variety of occupational standards which together build to allow an individual to perform a specific function within the workplace	Enables an individual to demonstrate competencies which support progression opportunities, and/or enhance employability, within a variety of occupational areas	Significant outcomes	19+	n/a	Level 3 Management and Leadership selecting outcomes from across a range of standards

Level 3 occupational progression qualifications	Covers a limited number of outcomes within an occupational standard where sufficiently full coverage of the standard cannot be obtained in an education setting	Enables an individual to demonstrate achievement of outcomes which employers identify as supporting progression into or within the occupation	Significant outcomes	16-19 19+	If ATE will require that awarding bodies engage with us prior to developing their submissions to ensure the appropriateness of their intended development.	No available example
Level 3 employer-proposed qualifications	Due to the lack of relationship to a standard on the occupational maps, we expect these to be rare, and their development will be approved by exception only	Enables entry to an occupation for which no occupational standard currently exists, although further learning/training in work may be required to reach 'full' occupational competence	Significant outcomes	19+	If ATE will require that awarding bodies engage with us prior to developing their submissions to establish suitable arrangement for their intended development.	No available example

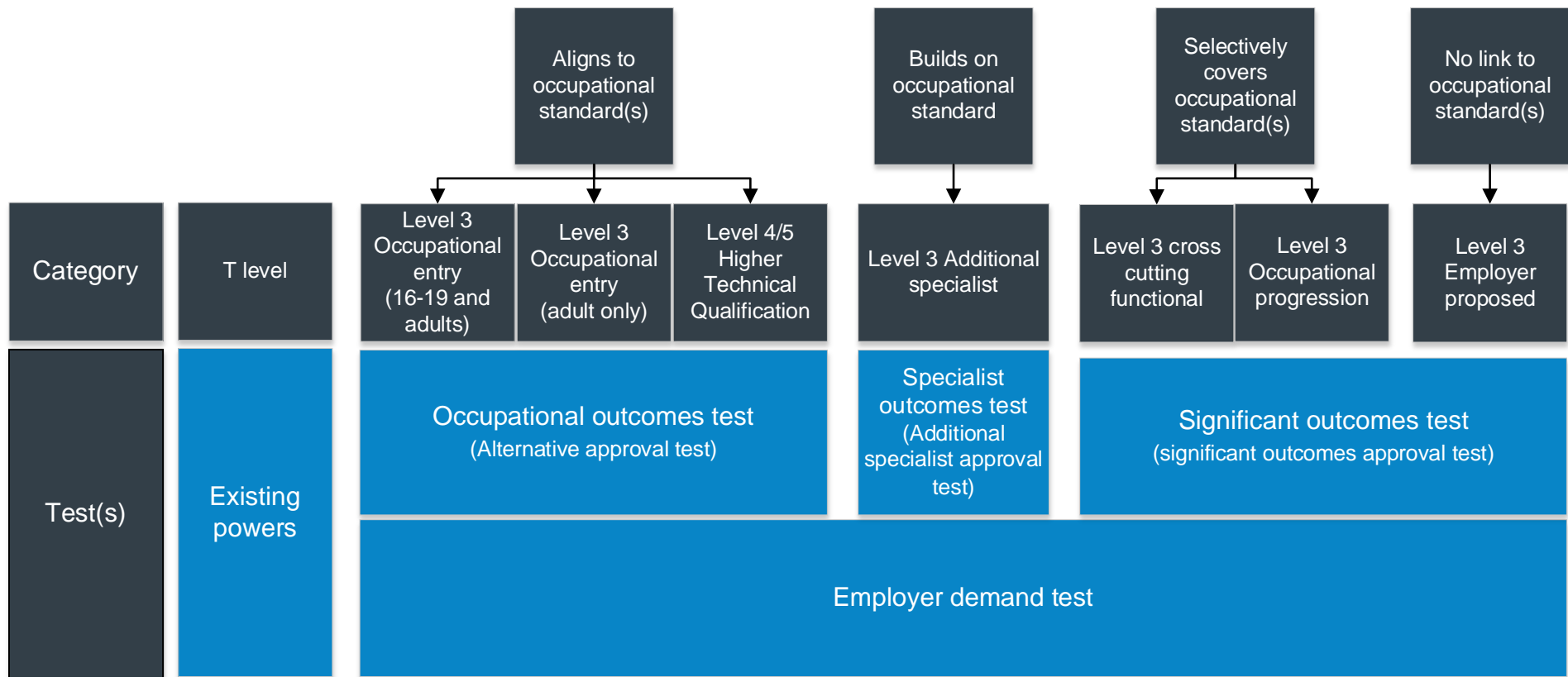


Figure 2: Diagram illustrating the link between the occupational standards, categories and statutory tests in the new approval framework

5. Setting criteria for approval

IfATE already publishes [criteria for the approval of Higher Technical Qualifications](#), with this not being subject to change at this time. We intend to finalise and publish criteria for the approval of level 3 technical qualifications following this consultation, and then for level 2 technical qualifications subject to the outcomes of DfE's current consultation. Part 2 of this consultation details specifics of the approval criteria.

5.1 CATEGORY CORE AIMS

We believe that all technical qualifications should have a clearly defined aim which states their value to students and employers.

The core aim will set out the relationship a technical qualification submitted for approval should have to an occupational standard(s), as well as the principal benefit the qualification intends to deliver to students who successfully achieve it. The core aim of the category should be considered by the awarding body when establishing its approach to satisfying Ofqual's [general condition E1](#).

5.2 CATEGORY PURPOSE STATEMENTS

In fulfilling their core aim, we believe that within each category, technical qualifications should also share certain fundamental purposes. These purposes are designed to ensure consistency of qualification offers within categories.

It is the intention that purpose statements will include reference to:

- I. the expertise a student will develop through achievement of the qualification
- II. what the achievement of the qualification will signal, primarily relating to signals of competence to employers
- III. what role the qualifications will play in engaging students as part of their course of study
- IV. the expected size of the qualification, as it relates to an overall course of study

Awarding bodies will be expected to pay regard to these statements when developing their qualification offer. [Awarding body technical guide](#) sets out the purpose statements for each category at level 3.

We recognise that there might be points in the qualification development process where an awarding body identifies tensions in referencing the published purpose statements appropriately. This may mean that the awarding body needs to compromise between one or more of the category purposes. In such instances, the awarding body

should seek to ensure that the category purpose statements which detail points I. and II. above are prioritised, as these principles are fundamental to the development and validation of occupational competence.

5.3 REGULATION AND RECOGNITION REQUIREMENTS

For all categories, we will make clear to awarding bodies the regulatory recognition required for a valid submission.

Level 3 and below qualifications will be required to be added to Ofqual's register of regulated qualifications prior to any submission of materials for IfATE review. Qualifications regulated by Ofqual, and the organisations offering them, are expected to be compliant with the [General Conditions of Recognition](#) as well as any other relevant regulatory requirements specified by Ofqual.

For Higher Technical Qualifications, regulation depends on the type of institution which has put forward the qualification for approval, with awarding bodies being required to seek regulation from either Ofqual or Office for Students (OfS) prior to submission of materials for IfATE review.

As part of the submission process for Higher Technical Qualifications or level 3 and below technical qualifications, Ofqual and OfS may inform IfATE of any relevant ongoing or impending regulatory action into a relevant qualification or awarding body. When making approval decisions, IfATE will have regard to this information.

In limited circumstances, it may be that a final approval decision cannot be granted until it has been demonstrated that ongoing or impending action has concluded. Once regulatory action has concluded, or we are otherwise satisfied that a decision can be progressed, we will proceed with the approval process.

For all qualifications approved by IfATE, where a statutory regulator operates within the sector, we also require that awarding bodies engage with, and seek recognition from, the statutory regulator prior to submitting materials for IfATE approval. In such instances, we will validate with the regulator that recognition has been sought prior to commencing with the review of qualification materials.

5.4 QUALIFICATION LEVELS

For each category we specify, we will include the relevant qualification level. Our occupational standards are also set at levels, and the qualification level should correspond to the level of the occupational standard.

This means that all level 3 technical qualifications must relate, where relevant, to occupational standards published at level 3, it is also expected that all level 2 technical

qualifications will relate to level 2 occupational standards. Higher Technical Qualifications must relate to one or more occupations for which occupational standards are published at level 4 or 5.

5.5 MANDATORY QUALIFICATIONS

Some qualifications submitted to the approvals process will already be mandated within apprenticeships. IfATE will review these qualifications, following the same process as for qualifications not already mandated. As the level 3 and below qualifications review seek to secure different qualification outcomes compared to apprenticeships, we anticipate that there may be a limited number of circumstances where qualifications approved for use in apprenticeships will not meet the level 3 and below approval criteria, and vice versa.

Failure to gain approval through the post-16 level 3 and below approval process will not automatically lead to a qualification no longer being mandated. We may, however, use this judgement to inform decisions about whether the qualification continues to be suitable for mandate in apprenticeships. We are planning to consult later this year on potential revisions to the mandatory qualifications policy.

5.6 PRE-DEFINING AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

To ensure awarding bodies are developing qualifications aligned to the skills needs of employers, we intend to publish a list of additional specialist and cross-cutting functional areas for which awarding bodies can submit qualifications for approval.

The areas will be broad in nature, for example:

- additional specialist – motor vehicle maintenance
- cross-cutting function – management

Within these areas, we also intend to publish a list of indicative duties we would encourage awarding bodies to use to form the basis for their qualification development.

We will not mandate that awarding bodies include all indicative duties within their qualification offer. Awarding bodies may wish to target different duties and/or go above and beyond the duties specified by IfATE when developing their offer.

Examples of a duty may be:

- a specialist duty for motor vehicle maintenance may be to ‘remove and replace hybrid vehicle components using correct procedures’
- a cross-cutting duty for management may be to ‘effectively manage personal and professional development’

IfATE intend to use these pre-defined lists to ensure that awarding bodies are developing qualifications which meet the current and future skills demands of industry.

We will establish these areas and duties through a review of current qualification provision, followed by a process of engagement with our employer contacts to determine areas of current or emerging need. We intend publish the pre-defined list alongside our criteria later this year.

Whilst our pre-defined list will seek to cover all qualification areas for which we expect submissions, we are interested in views as to whether IfATE should also introduce an exceptions process to allow awarding bodies to suggest additional areas in which qualification developments may be appropriate.

Questions we would like respondents to consider:

Question 7

Are you clear as to where different types of qualifications will fit within the categories described?

(drop down list/tick box) Very clear, Somewhat clear, Neither clear or unclear, Somewhat unclear, Very unclear, N/A. If yes/no, please provide an explanation for your response.

Question 8

We have set out our proposed approach for pre-defining additional specialist areas and cross-cutting functional areas against which awarding bodies can submit qualifications. Do you foresee any issues with this approach?

(drop down list/tick box) Yes, No, N/A. If yes/no, please provide an explanation for your response.

Question 9

Do you see a need for IfATE to introduce an exceptions process to allow awarding bodies to submit proposals for developments in the additional specialist and cross-cutting functional areas?

(drop down list/tick box) Yes, No, N/A. If yes/no, please provide an explanation for your response.

PART 2 - Approving level 3 technical qualifications

6. Criteria for approval

6.1 INTRODUCTION

As outlined in Part 1, to be approved a technical qualification will need to satisfy the relevant statutory approval test, the employer demand test and any other general requirements that we put in place in connection with the category. IfATE will apply its relevant tests to categories at levels 2 and 3, and Higher Technical Qualifications.

The following sections lay out factors IfATE propose to consider when assessing whether the approval criteria for level 3 technical qualifications is met. Where criteria may also apply to Higher Technical Qualifications, we have clearly indicated this within the section. We also provide an indication of the evidence we would expect to be submitted by awarding bodies for approval through our application form. When we publish our finalised criteria later this year, we intend to also provide supporting guidance which will help awarding bodies engage with the criteria. We will develop that guidance based on responses to this consultation.

The level 3 technical qualifications submitted to us will be regulated on an ongoing basis by Ofqual, who will also provide feedback to us as part of the approvals process. We have collaborated with Ofqual as we have developed the proposals to ensure our respective approaches drive quality in technical qualifications. We are mindful of creating unnecessary additional burden on awarding bodies. Ofqual is also consulting on regulations that relate to technical qualifications, and we have worked to ensure there is no duplication of or tension between requirements.

6.2 LEVEL 3 CRITERIA FOR APPROVAL

The following sections explain the criteria we propose to apply in our approvals process. They are set out as follows:

- Section 7 – how the employer demand test will be applied
- Section 8 – how we use our tests to assess the occupational relevance of content
- Section 9 – criteria relating to assessment, relevant to all level 3 categories
- Section 10 – criteria relating to titling and describing all level 3 approved technical qualifications

The figure below sets out how our criteria will relate to the level 3 technical qualification categories.

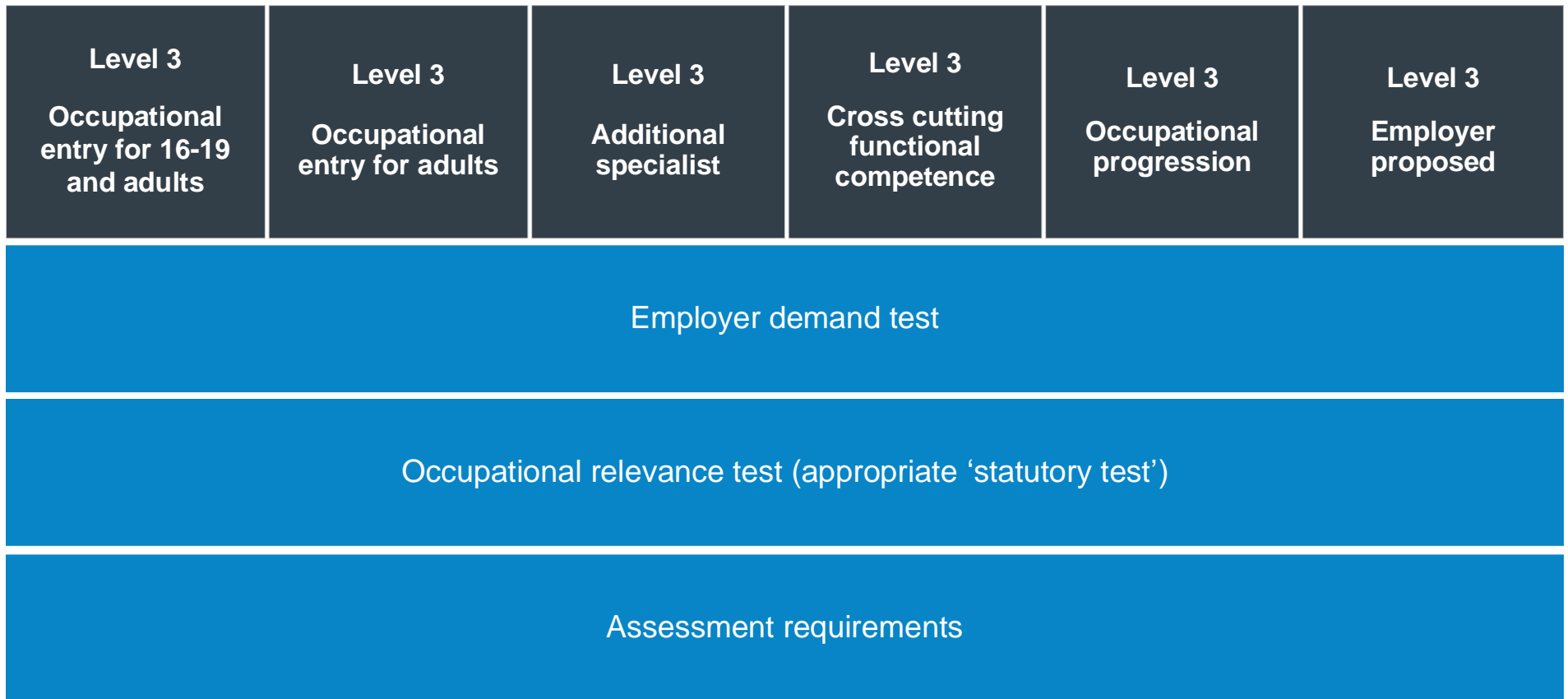


Figure 3: Categories at level 3 and their relationship to approval criteria

7. Putting employers at the heart of qualification validation

7.1 OVERVIEW OF THE EMPLOYER DEMAND TEST

The following criteria are applicable to all qualification categories at level 3 and below, as well as Higher Technical Qualifications.

IfATE's approach to approving technical education qualifications sets the employer voice at the heart of qualification design. Section 3.3 details the employer strategic guidance we intend to provide to indicate employer views of technical qualifications and their demands on the system. This should assist awarding bodies in understanding what employers think of current technical qualifications, and support identifying future needs or development. During our approvals process we will engage with employers, in particular our route panels, so that employer needs are fully reflected in our approval decisions.

As well as the checks we will carry out with employers, awarding bodies will have to demonstrate that their qualification is in demand and supported by employers. This forms the employer demand test, and awarding bodies seeking approval will need to produce a rationale with accompanying evidence that sets out how they are assured of employer demand for their qualifications.

IfATE may apply different criteria or evidentiary requirements for different categories of qualification, dependent on the core aim of the qualification and the purposes it is seeking to achieve.

7.2 EMPLOYER EVIDENCE REQUIREMENTS

Awarding bodies will be asked to provide an employer pack which may include evidence of the following:

- how awarding bodies have engaged, and will continue to engage, a relevant range of employers in both the design of, and ensuring the demand for, their qualification
- how employer comments have been factored into qualification design and development. This should include evidence of reviewing with employers the occupational relevance of the qualification content, assessment methods, and assessment contexts
- that there is a need for the specific qualification and that there is employer demand for an individual who achieved the pass requirement of the qualification

All employer evidence provided will be required to be referenced in an accompanying rationale. An awarding body's employer evidence rationale should include details of why the awarding body has chosen to collect the specific evidence included within their submission. It should also substantiate their approach to selecting the employers they engaged with and why the evidence provided by these employers is suitable to fulfil the requirements of the employer demand test. Ongoing engagement with employers must also be considered within the rationale, with the awarding body providing assurance of measures they will implement to ensure the ongoing currency of their offer.

7.3 IFATE ASSESSMENT OF EMPLOYER EVIDENCE

IfATE propose to review the employer evidence pack to ensure:

- a representative range of employer representatives were consulted
- that the awarding body has gathered a range of reliable evidence, which could be both qualitative and quantitative, which assures IfATE of employer demand for the qualification
- employer engagement has impacted design decisions, including any changes made to qualification and/or assessment design
- that the awarding body has a plan in place for future employer reviews of the qualification, ensuring that it remains relevant and continues to fulfil sector needs

Questions we would like respondents to consider:

Question 10

Do you agree that the evidence requested is sufficient to assure IfATE of employer demand for submitted qualifications?

(drop down list/tick box) Yes, No, N/A. If yes/no, please provide an explanation for your response.

Question 11

Do you have access to any additional data / evidence which you feel IfATE should consider when assessing the employer demand for submitted qualifications?

(drop down list/tick box) Yes, No, N/A. If yes, please provide an explanation for your response.

8. Ensuring that content delivered to students matters to employers

The following section provides detail of our evidence requirements and criteria in relation to our assessment of the occupational relevance of qualification content.

As part of the process of applying our tests, IfATE will engage subject matter experts and employers to comment on the accuracy and currency of content. This input forms part of evidence considered by IfATE in deciding if the relevant test has been met.

The following criteria are applicable to all qualification categories at level 3 and below, as well as relevant criteria also applying to Higher Technical Qualifications.

8.1 EVIDENCE IFATE WILL REQUIRE AS PART OF SUBMISSIONS

In order for IfATE to adequately assess the occupational relevance of content, we propose to ask awarding bodies to submit the following documents:

- the qualification specification document
- a document to show how the content and assessment methods in the qualification enable a student to demonstrate attainment of the qualification outcomes. This should include reference to the coverage of any/all KSBs and/or pre-defined duties
- a rationale for any additional content over and above that which is mapped to KSBs or pre-defined duties, which demonstrates that content is relevant to the occupation and valuable to employers

For qualifications aligned to KSBs within occupational standard(s):

- a rationale for any KSBs that cannot be achieved in any education setting(s) or that can only be partially achieved in an education setting

8.2 ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE IFATE WILL REQUIRE FOR EMPLOYER PROPOSED CATEGORY

For any qualifications awarding bodies intend to develop in this category, IfATE will first require awarding bodies to approach us with a proposal. We will undertake an employer-led review of the proposal and provide advice to awarding bodies as to whether to proceed with additional actions. IfATE's advice will be that either:

- a. we identify that there is a relevant pre-existing occupational standard(s) that may be able to be updated to enable the proposed qualification to align with it. This will be contingent on the relevant trailblazer group agreeing to any proposed changes

- b. we identify that there are no appropriate standards on the occupational maps and a new one would be required for the development to proceed.

We will require awarding bodies to work with their employer contacts to submit an occupational proposal to IfATE using the [developing an occupation proposal](#) process. We expect any occupational proposals to be submitted directly by the employer contacts and not the awarding body

8.2.1 NEXT STEPS FOR SUCCESSFUL PROPOSALS IN THIS CATEGORY

Should IfATE make a judgement in line with **option a**, awarding bodies will be invited to submit a qualification in a relevant occupational entry category once the occupational standard revisions have been completed. To avoid delays, we will keep awarding bodies informed of intended revisions to content, ensuring they are able to work on their qualification in parallel prior to the revised standard being made live.

Should IfATE make a judgement in line with **option b**, IfATE will then follow its usual process for considering the addition of an occupation to the maps, with a trailblazer group subsequently being formed. The awarding body who originated the idea, along with any relevant employer contacts may join this trailblazer group, however, the overall makeup of the group must be in line with current IfATE expectations around [trailblazer group composition](#).

Once a trailblazer group has commenced work on the standard, the awarding body will be invited to develop their qualification offer in parallel, ensuring their qualification offer reflects the outcomes within the standard in development.

Assessment of qualification content may take place whilst a standard is not yet published on the occupational maps to avoid delays in the qualification being made available to learners.

Once a standard is published any future approvals will take place against an occupational entry category.

Question we would like respondents to consider:

Question 12

Is the proposed process clear for submissions into the employer proposed category?
(drop down list/tick box) Yes, No, N/A. Please provide an explanation for your response.

8.3 PROPOSED APPROACH TO TESTING THE OCCUPATIONAL RELEVANCE OF CONTENT

To establish occupational relevance, IfATE will scrutinise an awarding bodies' rationale for the inclusion of content, as well as the links between content and the outcomes required to achieve the type of competence targeted by the Category into which the qualification is submitted. Through this process IfATE seeks to assure

itself that all content included within the qualification is suitable to enable an individual to competently practice within the occupational area.

Where content is created based on KSBs within an occupational standard(s):

Where an occupational standard exists, we will expect to observe that the majority (substantive element) of the qualification is made up of content based on KSBs drawn from the occupational standard(s). KSBs selected for inclusion should be covered in full with IfATE expecting to observe the following:

- **knowledge statements:** knowledge statements to be fully covered in the content of the qualification
- **skill statements:** skill statements to be fully covered in the content of the qualification. However, partial coverage will also be considered where access to technology and/or relevant settings is a factor
- **behaviour statements:** a minimum of partial coverage for behaviour statements to be achieved, for example, learning about the expectations of a behaviour. Where it is possible to fully cover a behaviour in a qualification, the awarding body should seek to do so

Where content is created based on duties published by IfATE within its pre-defined list [(see section 5.6 above)]:

For content mapped to duties which are suggested by IfATE, awarding bodies will not be required to provide justification for the inclusion of this content. Whilst we do not require a rationale for its inclusion, awarding bodies will still be required to demonstrate, and IfATE must be satisfied that there are, coherent links between their content and the agreed duties.

Where content is created which does not relate to outcomes published by IfATE (either through the occupational standards or pre-defined lists):

Where content has no relation to outcomes published by IfATE, we will expect awarding bodies to provide a substantive rationale for the inclusion of such content. This rationale must provide detail of employers who have requested the content be included within the qualification, as well as their reasons for its inclusion.

Question 13

Are you clear as to our proposed criteria for testing content aligned to KSBs within occupational standards which are published by IfATE?

(drop down list/tick box) Very clear, Somewhat clear, Neither clear or unclear, Somewhat unclear, Very unclear, N/A. If yes/no, please provide an explanation for your response.

Question 14

Are you clear as to our proposed criteria for testing content aligned to pre-defined duties which are published by IfATE?

(drop down list/tick box) Very clear, Somewhat clear, Neither clear or unclear, Somewhat unclear, Very unclear, N/A. If yes/no, please provide an explanation for your response.

Question 15

Are you clear as to our proposed criteria for testing content which does not align to any outcomes which are published by IfATE?

(drop down list/tick box) Very clear, Somewhat clear, Neither clear or unclear, Somewhat unclear, Very unclear, N/A. If yes/no, please provide an explanation for

9. Safeguarding that assessment delivers work ready students

The proposed criteria are relevant to all qualification categories at level 3 and below. Higher Technical Qualifications have already established assessment criteria. This is published on IfATE's website.

The criteria outline the design and evidence requirements for assessments. These will assure IfATE that the assessment of students within technical education qualifications at level 3 and below is appropriate and effective.

9.1 ASSESSMENT DESIGN

IfATE believes that it would be wrong to be overly prescriptive when it comes to assessment design in the technical education qualifications it approves. This is borne out of an understanding that different occupational areas lend themselves to different, yet similarly valid, assessment practices.

We do however require that awarding bodies are able to evidence that the design choices they take are suitable to the occupational area. We propose that awarding bodies should provide assurance of the following:

- I. that the qualification assessment is fit for purpose to assess the content defined in the qualification, balancing the requirements of validity, manageability, reliability, comparability, and minimising bias
- II. that the assessment methods provide a holistic opportunity for students to demonstrate competence across the qualification

9.2 GUIDANCE WHEN DEVELOPING AN ASSESSMENT OFFER

Technical qualifications should prepare students appropriately to enter, and progress in, skilled employment, and so assessment should be used to promote competence in relation to the occupational area covered by the qualification.

Assessment design should take opportunities, as appropriate to the occupation, to holistically assess how far students are competent across the breadth of the outcomes covered by the qualification. Consequently, we propose that the use of compensatory approaches is discouraged, if this could result in students achieving a pass for the qualification having failed to demonstrate sufficient competence for one or more of the occupational requirements. Where compensation is applied, we intend that awarding bodies should explain, within their submission, how their approach to compensation does not compromise an individual's ability to demonstrate occupational competence.

Where qualifications are designed with several assessments available at multiple points throughout the qualification, we believe there is a particular risk that these

may assess (and that students could develop) a fragmented rather than holistic understanding of the occupational area. In such situations, we think it is particularly important to ensure students can make effective connections and draw together knowledge, skills and/or understanding from across the occupational requirements. Where possible, we propose that assessments should also seek to incorporate key occupational behaviours, assessing these as part of the wider assessment construct.

Elements of modular assessment may also be considered in instances where an awarding body identifies such practice to be necessary and appropriate. If included, awarding bodies must ensure they are able to evidence that the use of a modular approach to assessment does not compromise a student's ability to demonstrate holistic competence in the occupational area.

9.3 GRADING TECHNICAL QUALIFICATIONS

The achievement of technical qualifications is intended to signal to employers that an individual has achieved a level of competence suitable to perform a job role or function within the occupational area. As a result, the requirements for a pass grade must be set accordingly within qualifications submitted for approval and we would expect that awarding bodies set out their approach as part of their submission for approval.

We intend to encourage awarding bodies to differentiate grading above the pass grade if employers have indicated this is valuable to them for recruitment purposes. Where qualifications help progression to further study, differentiation should match progression requirements. For example, this may be where a qualification at level 3 intends to attract UCAS points.

IfATE's expectation is that qualifications submitted for approval will operate at least a pass/fail grading structure.

To maintain comparability between their own qualification offers, we suggest that awarding bodies consider adopting a consistent grading scale approach. However, we do not intend to make this a requirement.

9.4 IFATE ASSESSMENT OF EVIDENCE RELATING TO ASSESSMENT DESIGN AND GRADING

9.4.1 Assessment strategy expectations

The areas we have set out above are proposed to inform the criteria we set relating to assessment design and delivery, and the awarding of technical qualifications. Ofqual also intends to set out regulatory requirements relating to this area; they propose to set requirements for the submission of an assessment strategy for each technical qualification. The proposed requirements for the development of a valid assessment strategy can be found within [Ofqual's consultation on its regulatory approach to level 3 alternative academic and technical qualifications](#).

Ofqual and IfATE are committed to avoiding duplication of requirements on awarding

bodies with regards the materials they must produce for approval of technical qualifications. To this end, it is our intention that any evidence we require from awarding bodies with regards to our assessment criteria can be included in a single assessment strategy. We have worked with Ofqual to ensure our respective proposed criteria and requirements do not conflict with one another.

9.4.2 Assessment package expectations

To demonstrate an awarding body's ability to deliver the assessments described within the assessment strategy document, we propose to require awarding bodies to submit an assessment package. This package should include the following materials:

- the learning objectives relating to the assessment
- past or sample question paper(s) and/or task brief(s)
- associated mark scheme(s) and/or assessment criteria (for example, marking rubric) for each question paper/and or task brief
- specification content coverage record for each assessment, where applicable
- unit/module and qualification-level grade descriptors, where applicable

Any past materials submitted as part of the assessment package must usually be no more than 2 years old. The submitted sample assessment materials must suitably reflect the awarding body's ability to deliver the approaches described within the assessment strategy.

Questions we would like respondents to consider:

Question 16

Are the assessment design flexibilities allowed helpful to ensure differences between occupations can be reflected within assessments?

(drop down list/tick box) Yes, No, N/A. If yes/no, please provide an explanation for your response.

Question 17

Is the guidance provided around assessment design sufficiently clear to facilitate the development of high-quality assessments?

(drop down list/tick box) Yes, No, N/A. If yes/no, please provide an explanation for your response.

10. Signalling quality to stakeholders

Qualification titles and supporting materials are primary sources of information as to the occupational focus and quality of technical qualifications.

As currently applied, we believe all qualification titles should clearly communicate the awarding body name and level, along with a short but accurate description of the content contained within the qualification.

To achieve an accurate description of content, IfATE believe it is essential that all approved technical qualifications are clear as to the occupational standard, specialised job role or cross-cutting workplace function to which they relate. This signposting within the qualification title, gives users a direct line of sight between the technical qualification and the employability outcome it targets. To further aid accessibility for users, we also propose that titling should refer to the level of competence signalled by achievement of the qualifications. This level of competence will relate to the category under which the qualification has been approved; with IfATE laying out specific titling conventions as part of the outcomes of this consultation.

In line with the above requirements, an example of a technical qualification title for a qualification approved in the additional specialist category may be:

[awarding body name] Level 3 specialist in electric vehicle repair (Motor Vehicle Service and Maintenance Technician)

In the example provided, the title references the awarding body name, qualification level, type of competence, job role and link to the occupational standards.

Additionally, we want to explore how the IfATE brand might be used within qualification titles as a marker of high-quality within the skills system. Due to the rigour and employer focused nature of our approvals process, it is expected that, in time, IfATE approval will become synonymous with high-quality in the technical qualification space. We therefore propose that the IfATE brand will be used to collectively group all approved level 3 and below technical qualifications, allowing for easy user recognition.

We intend to further explore the best application of this during the consultation period with a view to establishing the most effective means of using the IfATE brand to communicate quality. As part of this exploration, we will also seek views on how the IfATE brand might be used within associated qualification materials (for example, qualification specifications, certificates etc.) as a marker of quality. We intend the use of IfATE branding to augment rather than replace awarding bodies' own branding, with its inclusion supporting in the marketing of qualification materials.

As stated earlier in the document, we believe that the category core aim should form the basis for informing a qualification's objective. In addition to this, we propose that all qualification specifications should clearly refer to the technical qualification category in which the qualification has been approved. The specification should also

make clear reference to the occupational standard(s) to which the qualification aligns, builds on, or selectively covers.

Where a qualification is designed for an occupational entry category, we propose that awarding bodies (following approval) should publish the qualification's mapping to KSBs within their qualification specification materials. The publication of such mapping is useful both for employers to identify qualification coverage against employer-led standards, and providers when recognising prior learning for students transferring between related technical products (for example, for a classroom student moving into an apprenticeship). We do not currently propose to require this but would encourage it.

Questions we would like respondents to consider:

Question 18

Do you agree with IfATE's proposed requirements relating to the accurate description of content in qualification titles?

(drop down list/tick box) Yes, No, N/A. If yes/no, please provide an explanation for your response.

Question 19

Would it be helpful to employers if the title of a qualification included confirmation of employer endorsement following approval by IfATE?

(drop down list/tick box) Yes, No, N/A. If yes, please provide an explanation for your response.

Question 20

Do you agree that the publication of KSB mapping in occupational entry qualification specifications is beneficial to employers and providers?

(drop down list/tick box) Yes, No, N/A. If yes/no, please provide an explanation for your response.

11. Inclusive, future facing design

IfATE recognises that technical qualifications need to deliver knowledge, skills and behaviours that not just meet current occupational demands, but which also consider other demands, for example around sustainability, equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) or around digital developments. We are supporting the employers we work with to consider such demands, ensuring that where relevant they can be incorporated into our occupational standards. This will contribute to enhancing technical education, ensuring it is inclusive, future-facing and enabling.

We have developed frameworks relating to sustainability and digital skills and are in the process of developing a framework to promote considerations around EDI.

The [Sustainability Framework](#) recognises that all occupations have a direct or indirect impact on sustainability. Sustainable development can achieve value for money, generate benefits for organisations and wider society and contribute to minimising damage to the environment now and in the future. The framework is designed to support employers considering sustainable development in new and revised occupational standards at all levels.

The [Digital Skills Framework](#) has been developed in light of continued developments in technology. Digital knowledge and skills have become fundamental to occupations across all sectors. The framework is designed to support the inclusion of appropriate and relevant digital content in new and revised occupational standards at all levels. Digital requirements will vary between occupations and the framework aims to help determine what those requirements might be.

As well as the developments in relation to our occupational standards, we are looking at the other ways of enabling students to benefit from and participate in the digital world and to contribute to improving sustainability. At this point, we do not intend to require any particular approaches to qualification design in relation to these areas but do plan to ask awarding bodies to comment on how they have paid due attention to future proofing and embedding the issues covered in our digital and sustainability frameworks into their qualification offers.

IfATE will publish an equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) operational framework later this year. This will provide guidance on applying EDI principles across the development of apprenticeships and technical qualifications. We believe that technical education should provide fair and relevant means for individuals to learn new skills and realise new career opportunities, no matter their background.

At this point, we are considering how best we might use aspects such as our approvals process to promote EDI in qualification design and delivery. We are looking at how we might better understand the EDI-related impact of technical qualifications on students, and as part of this we want to understand what data awarding bodies might collect on any protected characteristics of students.

Questions we would like respondents to consider:

Question 21

If you are an awarding body, what EDI data do you currently collect for students who undertake your qualifications and would you be prepared, and able, to share it?

(drop down list/tick box) We collect EDI data and would be prepared and able to share it, We collect EDI data and would not be prepared and able to share it, We do not collect EDI data, Not applicable as not an awarding body, If any answer other than N/A, please provide an explanation for your response.

Question 22

If you are an awarding body, how do you plan to embed our sustainability and digital skills frameworks in qualifications?

Open Response

12. Impact Assessment

As a public body, the public sector equality duty in the Equality Act 2010 applies to us. As we have developed our approach to approval of technical qualifications at level 3 and below, we have considered the potential impacts on people who might share particular protected characteristics. We have also considered broader, more general impacts on our wider stakeholder audience. We set out in Annexes B and C the potential impacts that we have identified.

We have reviewed the approach to approval we propose to take to deliver government's ambitions for level 3 and below qualifications in relation to technical qualifications. This includes the criteria we intend to establish and the process we will put in place. A separate impact assessment was carried out by DfE with regards the changes to the qualification landscape as part of its qualifications review. We have been mindful of the potential impacts that DfE identified as we developed our proposed approach and considered for ourselves what the impact could be of our proposals.

Questions we would like respondents to consider:

Question 23

With reference to the impact assessment published in Annex A, are there any additional steps that could be taken to mitigate any negative impact, resulting from the proposed approach to approvals?

(drop down list/tick box) Yes, No. If yes, please provide examples, data and/or evidence where possible.

Question 24

With reference to the impact assessment published in Annex B, are there any other potential impacts (positive or negative) that have not been identified?

(drop down list/tick box) Yes, No. If yes, please provide examples, data and/or evidence where possible.

Annex A: General Impact Assessment

We have undertaken an assessment of the impact generally of introducing our approval process on key parties in the technical education system. We have focused this on the main groups of people or organisations we determined may be most likely impacted, positively or negatively, by our approach.

Awarding bodies

Awarding bodies will need to familiarise themselves with the new qualification categories and associated statutory tests that will now apply across all technical education. They will need to align existing and new qualification content and assessments to meet the requirements set out in the approval criteria. It is the first time, for many technical qualifications, that there has been any signalling of qualification content (through our occupational standards) that awarding bodies must follow. A rationale outlining employer support accompanied by a range of employer evidence will also be required for all qualifications. An assessment strategy, rationale for additional content and comprehensive mapping template will similarly be needed for each qualification. The extent of the reform, and the ambitious timetable associated with it, means it is likely that awarding bodies will need to considerably increase resource dedicated to the re-development and mapping of qualifications to meet our criteria.

Some awarding bodies have a limited stakeholder engagement function and to date industry validation for technical qualifications has not previously been a requirement. Consequently, they will likely need to either increase their dedicated staffing for stakeholder engagement activities or re-allocate existing staff time to carry out this function. Increased emphasis in this area may also require awarding bodies to invest in additional tools to aid their sourcing and engagement of relevant industry contacts.

We recognise that awarding bodies are also likely to be reviewing their business models based on DfE's funding decisions – for example, the position to not fund for 16-19-year-olds qualifications that overlap with standards covered by T Levels. While we are operating independently of DfE's funding policy, we are alert to the pressure that awarding bodies may be under to get their technical qualifications approved in coming years to be considered for public funding. For some awarding bodies, they may be seeking to review and/or reform up to several hundred technical qualifications in the space of two to three years. We will continue to engage with awarding bodies to understand their intentions for submission through the approval cycles. We will remain alert to potential impacts on availability of qualifications to providers.

A further impact we have considered is around the effect of introducing an approval process and how the specific approval process we propose to implement may affect awarding bodies. Many technical qualifications at level 3 have not been subject to an approval process previously and the qualifications to be submitted to our process will have to meet our criteria as well as regulations set by Ofqual. We have considered the risk of where our requirements conflict, create tension or duplicate Ofqual's. To

mitigate this, we have collaborated closely to align our approaches and have committed to presenting a single source of reference for awarding bodies which clearly signposts all requirements they must meet. We have also committed to enable awarding bodies to only have to submit materials relating to approval once, to IfATE, and we will distribute materials as necessary following submission. Once our approval process is in operation, we will engage with awarding bodies to evaluate whether the process is as effective and coherent as it can be. This will mitigate, as far as possible, the regulatory burden on awarding bodies.

Ultimately, it is our aim that IfATE approval is recognised widely as a marker of high-quality within the skills system. As we build our reputation across a wider range of technical qualifications, awarding bodies who achieve approval for their qualifications will not only benefit from being able to be considered for funding by DfE (at level 3, and subject to consultation, at level 2), but will also benefit from the association of being approved by IfATE.

Education and Training Providers

Education and training providers will likely incur familiarisation costs to offer new or reformed IfATE-approved qualifications. While providers do periodically update and change their suite of qualifications this would be out of their control. The lead-in time to familiarise themselves with the new qualifications may vary depending on when certain qualifications are approved by IfATE within any single approval cycle. This may have a knock-on effect on curriculum planning, resource allocation, programme management, and staff training requirements. We will aim to provide up-to-date information on approvals as often as we are able and will clearly state intended timelines for approval in order to aid planning. One benefit of introducing approvals and aiming to streamline the technical qualifications landscape, is that qualification choice should become clearer for providers. They should take confidence in IfATE approval, to know that approved qualifications will deliver the needs of employers, preparing students effectively to enter or progress in their employment.

We are alert to the potential for qualifications to be designed that require providers to further invest in facilities or which prohibit providers from offering certain qualifications because of the design, content or assessment. In meeting Ofqual's General Conditions of Recognition, awarding bodies offering Ofqual-regulated qualifications must ensure that providers are able to develop cost-effective arrangements for the delivery of assessment, only using resources that could be reasonably expected to be needed or which the awarding body provides. While we think it is important that awarding bodies meet the needs of employers, they must balance the needs of providers as well to ensure that qualifications can be delivered. As we monitor the impact of these reforms, we will continue to engage with providers and their representative bodies so that we can identify any potential barriers to accessing IfATE approved technical qualifications.

Employers

Employers have played a central role in developing the occupational standards

against which technical qualifications must map. IfATE approval of technical qualifications will provide employers with a clear, recognisable, and high-quality qualifications market. The employer demand test will allow IfATE to use employer evidence provided by awarding bodies to assess whether a qualification is genuinely needed by employers. This will result in awarding bodies relying on the input of employers to a greater extent than has previously been the case. The rigorousness of IfATE's proposed approval process will give employers confidence in the knowledge, skills and behaviours students will possess upon completion of technical qualifications. It will ensure that employers are able to access the skilled workforce essential to growing the economy.

We are alert to the increasing demands we may place on employers – especially our member employers, such as our route panel members – as we seek to engage them in relation to even more technical education products. We are reviewing our approaches to employer engagement and will continue to work with our employers to ensure we are able to maximise the expertise they bring to us without them being over-burdened by our expanded responsibility.

Students

The proposed approval process intends to only approve those technical qualifications that can both align to our employer-led occupational standards and prove employer demand through significant evidence requirements. Our process will ensure quality is at the heart of the publicly funded qualifications market. It will also deliver on DfE's aim to streamline the qualification offer at level 3, embedding T Levels as the technical qualification of choice for 16-19-year-olds, and ensuring that all technical qualifications receiving public funding offer clear entry into skilled employment or further progression. As a result, the potential impact on students overall is expected to be positive as the quality of options is increased.

We are alert to the potential that some students may find it more challenging to access some of the level 3 technical qualifications that remain in the qualifications landscape in the future. We are engaging closely with DfE on their review of qualifications at level 2 and below, to ensure that students can access suitable opportunities that aid progression into level 3 study.

Annex B: Equality impact assessment

The Public Sector Equality Duty

Under Section 149(1) of the Equality Act 2010, the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education has a duty to have due regard to the need to:

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act
- (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it
- (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it

The relevant 'protected characteristics' for the purposes of each element of the Public Sector Equality Duty are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race (including ethnicity)
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

IfATE also needs to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination against someone because of their marriage or civil partnership status. This means that the first aim of the duty outlined at a) above applies to this characteristic but that the other aims outlined at b) and c) (advancing equality and fostering good relations) do not apply.

Limitations on assessing impact for certain protected characteristics

Information on sexual orientation, religion and beliefs, pregnancy, and gender re-assignment, are not collected as part of the Individualised Learner Record (ILR) required to be submitted to DfE. This means we do not have access to up-to-date data on these characteristics, and we cannot fully assess whether the proposed approach to approval is likely to have differing impacts on people with different characteristics in these areas. We are looking, as part of our work on EDI (as set out in section 12 at how we might better understand the EDI-related impact of technical qualifications on students. As part of this we want to understand what data awarding bodies might collect on any protected characteristics of students so that we can better understand where we are able to assess the impact and identify any issues

that our approval process poses for particular groups.

Impacted Groups

The Department for Education completed two impact assessments as part of their two-stage consultation that led to the publication of the [review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 in England](#). These documents covered the equality impacts of the wider policy reform, particularly relating to age, disability and race. The updated assessment in July 2021 found that those from Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) backgrounds, Asian ethnic groups, disadvantaged backgrounds, and males are disproportionately likely to be affected.

It is not possible for us to quantify potential impact at this point, as the availability of qualifications will be impacted by:

- provider choice/offer
- student preferences for study (for example whether to study technical or academic qualifications, or where possible a mix of both)
- awarding body choice around which qualifications to submit for approval
- awarding body success in their qualification being approved by IfATE and then by DfE for funding.

However, the design of our approval process will ensure that our approval criteria will be applied fairly to all technical qualifications submitted to us for review. Our criteria have been written so as not to create any specific bias and to avoid negative equality impact. As such, we have not identified any potential impacts on students with protected characteristics from our proposals relating to qualification and assessment design. Under their obligations in the 2010 Equality Act, awarding bodies must consider the accessibility of their qualifications to students including those with particular protected characteristics. As such awarding bodies will need to be mindful of the impact of their assessment methodology choices on students.

Our approach to approval will ensure that IfATE-approved qualifications are fit for purpose and of high-quality for delivery to students, including those with protected characteristics. As DfE outlined in their impact assessments, students are expected to benefit from a more rigorous qualification system and our approval process will ensure that in future qualifications will better equip students with the necessary skills for progression into employment or further technical study.

ANNEX C: Full set of consultation questions

Question 1

Which of the below best describes your viewpoint in this consultation? (Select one)

(drop down list/tick box) Awarding Body, Employer, Further Education College, School, Sixth Form College, Student, University or Other Higher Education Provider, Parent/Guardian/Carer, Teacher/Lecturer, Headteacher/Principal, Charitable Organisation, Careers Professional, Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) Professional, Local Authority Official, Government Department/ Arms-length Body, Non-departmental Public Body, Independent Training Provider, Regulatory Body, Mayoral Combined Authority, Local Enterprise Partnership Other (Please state)

Question 1.1

If Employer is selected, follow up questions to appear:

Which of the below best describes the route/s you work in?

(drop down list/tick box) List routes here, Other (Please state)

Question 1.2

Are you part of any of the following?

(drop down list/tick box) Trailblazer Group, Route Panel, Regional Group, Other (Please state)

Question 2

Is your viewpoint representative of your organisation?

(drop down list/tick box) Yes, No I am responding as an individual, Other (Please state)

Question 3

Have you engaged with IfATE's qualification approval process previously?

(drop down list/tick box) Yes for Higher Technical Qualifications, Yes for T Level programmes, Yes for both Higher Technical Qualifications and T Level programmes, No.

Question 4

What current barriers do employers face when looking to utilise technical qualifications for workforce development and/or recruitment?

Open response

Question 5

We plan to provide guidance to awarding bodies to help them with the shaping of their development priorities/approaches. This guidance would be developed by employers. Do you agree that this would be helpful?

(drop down list/tick box) Yes, No, N /A. Please provide an explanation for your response.

Question 6

What information would it be most useful to include within our strategic guidance to inform the development priorities/approaches of awarding bodies?

Open response

Question 7

Are you clear as to where different types of qualifications will fit within the categories described?

(drop down list/tick box) Very clear, Somewhat clear, Neither clear or unclear, Somewhat unclear, Very unclear, N/A. If yes/no, please provide an explanation for your response.

Question 8

We have set out our proposed approach for pre-defining additional specialist areas and cross-cutting functional areas against which awarding bodies can submit qualifications. Do you foresee any issues with this approach?

(drop down list/tick box) Yes, No, N/A. If yes/no, please provide an explanation for your response.

Question 9

Do you see a need for IfATE to introduce an exceptions process to allow awarding bodies to submit proposals for developments in the additional specialist and cross-cutting functional areas?

(drop down list/tick box) Yes, No, N/A. If yes/no, please provide an explanation for your response.

Question 10

Do you agree that the evidence requested is sufficient to assure IfATE of employer demand for submitted qualifications?

(drop down list/tick box) Yes, No, N/A. If yes/no, please provide an explanation for your response.

Question 11

Do you have access to any additional data / evidence which you feel IfATE should consider when assessing the employer demand for submitted qualifications?

(drop down list/tick box) Yes, No, N/A. If yes, please provide an explanation for your response.

Question 12

Is the proposed process clear for submissions into the employer proposed category?

(drop down list/tick box) Yes, No, N/A. Please provide an explanation for your response.

Question 13

Are you clear as to our proposed criteria for testing content aligned to KSBs within occupational standards which are published by IfATE?

(drop down list/tick box) Very clear, Somewhat clear, Neither clear or unclear, Somewhat unclear, Very unclear, N/A. If yes/no, please provide an explanation for your response.

Question 14

Are you clear as to our proposed criteria for testing content aligned to pre-defined duties which are published by IfATE?

(drop down list/tick box) Very clear, Somewhat clear, Neither clear or unclear, Somewhat unclear, Very unclear, N/A. If yes/no, please provide an explanation for your response.

Question 15

Are you clear as to our proposed criteria for testing content which does not align to any outcomes which are published by IfATE?

(drop down list/tick box) Very clear, Somewhat clear, Neither clear or unclear, Somewhat unclear, Very unclear, N/A. If yes/no, please provide an explanation for your response.

Question 16

Are the assessment design flexibilities allowed helpful to ensure differences between occupations can be reflected within assessments?

(drop down list/tick box) Yes, No, N/A. If yes/no, please provide an explanation for your response.

Question 17

Is the guidance provided around assessment design sufficiently clear to facilitate the development of high-quality assessments?

(drop down list/tick box) Yes, No, N/A. If yes/no, please provide an explanation for your response.

Question 18

Do you agree with IfATE's proposed requirements relating to the accurate description of content in qualification titles?

(drop down list/tick box) Yes, No, N/A. If yes/no, please provide an explanation for your response.

Question 19

Would it be helpful to employers if the title of a qualification included confirmation of employer endorsement following approval by IfATE?

(drop down list/tick box) Yes, No, N/A. If yes, please provide an explanation for your response.

Question 20

Do you agree that the publication of KSB mapping in occupational entry qualification specifications is beneficial to employers and providers?

(drop down list/tick box) Yes, No, N/A. If yes/no, please provide an explanation for your response.

Question 21

If you are an awarding body, what EDI data do you currently collect for students who undertake your qualifications and would you be prepared, and able, to share it?

(drop down list/tick box) We collect EDI data and would be prepared and able to share it, We collect EDI data and would not be prepared and able to share it, We do not collect EDI data, Not applicable as not an awarding body, If any answer other than N/A, please provide an explanation for your response.

Question 22

If you are an awarding body, how do you plan to embed our sustainability and digital skills frameworks in qualifications?

Open Response

Question 23

With reference to the impact assessment published in Annex A, are there any additional steps that could be taken to mitigate any negative impact, resulting from the proposed approach to approvals?

(drop down list/tick box) Yes, No. If yes, please provide examples, data and/or evidence where possible.

Question 24

With reference to the impact assessment published in Annex B, are there any other potential impacts (positive or negative) that have not been identified?

(drop down list/tick box) Yes, No. If yes, please provide examples, data and/or evidence where possible.

ANNEX D: Glossary

IfATE are providing the following definitions to support the reader in engaging with our consultation only.

Awarding body: An organisation that designs, delivers and awards qualifications. This term encompasses the ‘awarding organisations’ regulated by Ofqual (the qualifications regulator in England) as well as other organisations, such as Higher Education Institutions, who design, deliver and award Higher Technical Qualifications (and who are regulated by the Office for Students).

Comparability: Comparability is the degree to which the results of different qualifications reflect the same or similar standards of achievement by a student in an assessment.

Compensatory approaches: Compensatory approaches in the awarding of qualifications allow for strong performance in one aspect of the assessment to compensate for poor performance in another.

Course of education: Learning and assessment activities undertaken by a student normally in an education setting.

Duty/Duties: the activities/competencies that will be carried out by a competent person in a specific occupation; requires the application of knowledge, skills and behaviours in the workplace.

Education setting: An education setting is where a student engages in formal education, led by an education provider such as a school, college or independent training provider. This could include classroom and remote learning, possibly combined with simulated settings and workshops.

Emerging skills: skills which have been identified as those which will impact the nature of occupations in the short/medium term. This could be due to political drivers/priorities or the development of new processes/technologies. These skills may already be practiced by early adopters and/or specialist organisations.

Entry level competence: attaining entry level competence in an occupation should enable a student to take a job in skilled employment in that occupation or one that is related. Further learning/training in work may be required to reach ‘full’ occupational competence

Manageability: Manageability relates to the feasibility of carrying out particular assessment processes. A manageable assessment process is one which places reasonable demands on providers and students.

Minimising Bias: Ensuring that a qualification assessment does not produce unreasonably adverse outcomes for students who share a common attribute. This relates to fairness to all students and is closely related to statutory equality duties.

Occupation: An occupation is a set of jobs whose main tasks and duties have a

high degree of similarity across a relevant sector or sectors, rather than being associated with a single employer.

Occupational competence: On completion of the qualification the new entrant to the occupation is able to carry out the role in any size employer across any relevant sector

Occupational maps: Occupational maps group occupations with related knowledge, skills and behaviours into 15 technical routes, making it easier to see the opportunities for career progression within that particular route. Most routes have been split into a number of pathways and clusters to group occupations with similar knowledge, skills and behaviours. The maps provide a useful guide to show the technical education options available for employers, as well as for individuals and training providers.

Occupational standard: A description of an occupation. It contains an occupational profile, and describes the 'knowledge, skills and behaviours' (KSBs) needed for someone to be competent in the occupation's duties.

Reliability: The extent to which a student might get the same result if the same assessment approach (although not the exact same assessment) was repeated at another time.

Validity: Validity is about whether an assessment is an accurate measure of a student's skills and knowledge. A valid assessment provides valued information appropriate to the intended purpose of the qualification.

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